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# Prospects for Peace in Cambodia: Status of Diplomatic Maneuvering

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An Intelligence Assessment

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EA 88-10038  
August 1988

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# Prospects for Peace in Cambodia: Status of Diplomatic Maneuvering

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An Intelligence Assessment

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**Prospects for Peace  
in Cambodia: Status of  
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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 23 August 1988  
was used in this report.*

Diplomatic machinations surrounding the informal talks in Jakarta in July 1988 moved at least some of the contending parties in Cambodia closer to a settlement. The most likely prospects appear to be either a multilateral agreement calling for a four-part coalition government or a bilateral accord between Prince Norodom Sihanouk and People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) Prime Minister Hun Sen. As matters now stand, we believe:

- Vietnam is in a strong position after scoring important tactical victories in Jakarta, and Prince Sihanouk again is on the offensive. He apparently believes expressions of support from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, and others, including the United States, have substantially reinforced his standing.
- Diplomatic maneuvering on the fringes of the Jakarta talks by Sihanouk and the PRK has brought those two closer together, but preventing a return to power by the Khmer Rouge still looms as the most important problem.

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We believe the accelerated pace of diplomatic activity in Cambodia has ASEAN, China, and the Khmer Rouge on the defensive. ASEAN is responding by dramatically increasing support for the non-Communist resistance factions. In our view, the improved supply situation and additional training will permit some expansion of non-Communist forces and marginal improvement in their capabilities. The provision of US-type weapons, such as M-16 rifles, also might lend a psychological boost to the guerrillas. On the other hand, the non-Communists will be hard pressed to overcome chronic deficiencies in leadership, discipline and morale, and organizational weaknesses. We believe these constitute more serious impediments to their performance and potential than supply problems.

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China is keeping all its options open but apparently is moving toward a more flexible position. Beijing has floated a peace proposal and tried to distance itself somewhat from the Khmer Rouge in order to avoid the appearance of intransigence. The Chinese also are pursuing a dialogue with the Soviets, and Beijing may be ready for hard bargaining on important issues, such as the future of the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia.

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[REDACTED]

The Khmer Rouge is struggling to avoid diplomatic isolation by appearing nominally cooperative and by offering its own peace plan. In the field, the guerrillas are trying to strengthen their position, for example, by expanding supply caches and increasing political action. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets almost certainly welcome the recent developments. They favor an early solution in Cambodia because it would help clear the way to better relations with China and ASEAN and eventually ease the burden of aid to Vietnam. Moscow is unlikely to take drastic steps, such as cutting aid to Vietnam, to hasten a political settlement, however, in order to avoid damaging bilateral relations or risking access to Cam Ranh Bay. [REDACTED]

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Diplomatic efforts are under way on several levels that, we believe, could produce further movement toward a settlement. While the working group established during the Jakarta talks hammers out details for another informal meeting, possibly by December 1988, Chinese officials are preparing for discussions with the Soviets on Cambodia, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach is set to meet his Thai counterpart in August 1988 for the third time this summer, and Prince Sihanouk is gearing up for a third round of talks with Hun Sen, probably in November 1988. [REDACTED]

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**Prospects for Peace  
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**The Jakarta Scorecard: Advantage Vietnam,  
Prince Sihanouk**

Although the four Khmer participants—the non-Communist Sihanoukist National Army and Khmer People's National Liberation Front, the Communist Khmer Rouge, and Vietnam's client People's Republic of Kampuchea regime—admit they made little progress toward a settlement during the Jakarta talks in July 1988, they agreed to form a working group to discuss their differences and prepare for another meeting, possibly by December 1988. Vietnam and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) scored important public relations points that bolster their position at the expense primarily of the Khmer Rouge, but also at some cost to ASEAN and China. According to US diplomats, for example, Vietnam, the PRK, and Laos were well prepared for the meeting and presented coordinated position papers that apparently caught ASEAN by surprise. US diplomats report that ASEAN did not forge a consensus beforehand to avoid compromising the informal nature of the talks.

Alatas after the talks underscored the atmospherics in Jakarta. Khmer Rouge President Khieu Samphan tried to shift attention to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during a brief press conference after the meeting, but with little effect.

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Vietnam also appeared to gain from concessions offered by Prince Sihanouk in separate discussions with the four Khmer factions. Sihanouk accepted Hun Sen's offer to head the national reconciliation council, and the Prince appeared to back away from his demands that the PRK be dissolved before a new government is formed by agreeing to use PRK administrative structures at least immediately after a settlement. Sihanouk also did not mention an international peacekeeping force—which Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge oppose—and called instead for an international control commission that may have peacekeeping responsibilities.

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The Vietnamese also took a low profile in Jakarta, thereby deflecting attention from their role in Cambodia to the consternation of ASEAN and the satisfaction of Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, according to US diplomats. This cast some of the limelight on Hun Sen, who stole the show by announcing a seven-point peace plan that included mostly repackaged proposals, according to US diplomats. Among other things, the initiative calls for the elimination of the Pol Pot clique, disarming the Khmer Rouge, and the formation of a national reconciliation council under Prince Sihanouk. It reiterates Vietnam's pledge to leave Cambodia as early as the end of 1989 but adds the proviso that outside support for the resistance end simultaneously.

Vietnam also focused attention on the Khmer Rouge and on the need to minimize its influence. The strong condemnation of the Khmer Rouge in the coordinated statement issued by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali

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**Hanoi Forcing the Issue**

Vietnam is aiding the pace of diplomacy in Cambodia by relinquishing military domination. Hanoi withdrew 15,000 to 20,000 troops in November 1987, and Vietnamese officials promise another 50,000 will follow this year. Party General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh promised in July 1988 that the remaining 50,000 to 60,000 troops will leave as early as the end of 1989 or one year ahead of Vietnam's original schedule.

More important, Hanoi is tacitly admitting that it cannot destroy the Communist Khmer Rouge military and is placing the onus for its fate on ASEAN, particularly Thailand, and China. Indeed, Hanoi is playing masterfully on a longstanding contradiction in ASEAN policy on Cambodia that includes support for the Khmer Rouge, which is indispensable militarily as the largest and most effective resistance group (with its 30,000 to 40,000 troops) but unacceptable politically because of its brutal reputation. By demonstrating that it is serious about withdrawing from Cambodia, Hanoi also is calling the bluffs of the resistance groups and their foreign backers. Vietnam has warned repeatedly that a unilateral withdrawal would spell the end of negotiating opportunities. This message has not been lost on the 65-year-old Sihanouk, who harbors an intense desire to return to Phnom Penh before he dies. According to US diplomats [ ] Sihanouk considers this his best, and possibly last, chance to recapture a leadership role in Cambodia. [ ]

**Sihanouk Forging Ahead**

Sihanouk apparently was sufficiently impressed by Hun Sen's concessions in Jakarta to agree to a third meeting in Paris, according to US diplomats, probably in November 1988. After their second encounter in January 1988, he canceled further talks, complaining Hun Sen had offered nothing concrete and was on a short Vietnamese leash that limited the negotiations. Sihanouk has changed his tune in recent public statements and now claims that talking to Hun Sen is

the same as talking to Vietnam. Be that as it may, their apparent agreement on forming a new government and peacekeeping forces clears two major hurdles and sets the stage for further progress in November. [ ]

Sihanouk is well aware that his personal charisma and widespread acceptability are important assets, and he is playing them for all they are worth. After taking a leave of absence from the resistance coalition's presidency in May 1987 and formally severing his ties to it in July 1988, he has become an independent player in Cambodia. To this point, he has walked a fine line between Vietnam on one side and the resistance and its backers on the other as he attempts to pressure both sides into moves toward a solution for Cambodia that places him in power. Sihanouk, however, now is focusing his attention more and more on his old nemesis—the Khmer Rouge. His aides say his primary goal is to isolate the group diplomatically and to cut off its external support from China via Thailand. We believe this agenda provides a sound basis for collaboration with Vietnam, [ ]

[ ] Sihanouk's military forces already have established a rapport with their PRK counterparts inside Cambodia. [ ]

The bilateral dialogue with Hun Sen provides a useful arena for Sihanouk to pursue these objectives. Sihanouk is in control of the proceedings while ASEAN, Chinese, and Khmer Rouge influence is nil. His earlier meetings with Hun Sen perceptibly rattled Thailand and China, which suddenly launched sweeping reviews of their Cambodia policies, according to US diplomats, and made adjustments to avoid alienating him. Sihanouk probably hopes for similar results this time, and he will be looking for more concrete commitments from Beijing and Bangkok to rein in the Khmer Rouge. [ ]

Sihanouk attributes his ability to pursue independent diplomacy to strong pledges of support by ASEAN, China, and others, including the United States. In this vein, lethal aid from the United States for his troops is becoming a favorite theme of Sihanouk's; he has

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hinted several times in recent weeks that the United States has agreed to arm his forces. He claims such efforts to strengthen him militarily buoy his overall standing and will place his troops in a position to keep the Khmer Rouge at bay and to hold their own if some form of coalition government is established.

[redacted] in the meantime, the Sihanoukists are receiving dramatically increased support from Singapore and have overcome problems in the Thai distribution system. [redacted]

The additional equipment and supplies and expanded training should help Sihanouk's 12,000-man force and the 5,000-man KPNLF add 5,000 to 6,000 troops by the end of 1988. In our view, however, the improved supply situation is generating unwarranted optimism about the non-Communists' prospects. Sihanouk's forces have done little more than establish an embryonic guerrilla infrastructure inside Cambodia over the past several years, and they are far from an effective fighting force. The KPNLF has teetered on the brink of collapse for over a year because of factional infighting, poor discipline and morale, and other problems that are still unresolved. The brighter supply picture will do little to remedy these organizational weaknesses or help to close appreciably the vast gulf in capabilities between the non-Communists and the Khmer Rouge. [redacted]

#### **ASEAN and China Try To Keep Pace**

Increased support for the non-Communist resistance is part of ASEAN's effort to cope with the changing circumstances in Cambodia. Although building non-Communist forces on a par with the Khmer Rouge has long been a stated goal of ASEAN policy, we detect a new urgency in these efforts now that prospects for a solution are improving. ASEAN members apparently are concerned that the non-Communists are unprepared for an agreement, and we believe recent diplomatic developments have caught ASEAN flatfooted as well. The organization hoped the Jakarta

talks would help it recapture the initiative and establish some control over the process, but ASEAN clearly lost the public relations contest to Vietnam, in our view, and still finds itself reacting to events. [redacted]

Moreover, fundamental differences in outlook among the members are resurfacing. Indonesia and Malaysia are encouraged by Vietnamese troop withdrawals from Cambodia so far and want to press ahead aggressively toward a solution. Thailand and Singapore, however, want to keep the pressure on Hanoi until it makes good on its pledge to withdraw completely from Cambodia. Thailand, in particular, does not believe the time is right to move against the Khmer Rouge, and it wants to be sure any agreement accounts for Chinese interests to protect bilateral relations. [redacted]

Nevertheless, we expect Thailand will adopt a more conciliatory approach toward Vietnam and the situation in Cambodia. Vietnam's troop withdrawals mean that Thailand could be saddled with the guerrillas and over 250,000 refugees and the political damage of being perceived as trying to put the Khmer Rouge back in power or to obstruct a settlement. These factors provide powerful impetus for Bangkok to seek a solution in Cambodia rather than accept the costs of intransigence. Thai officials seem resigned that eventually they will have to deal with the Khmer Rouge, and [redacted] they are considering ways to do so. The questions are when and how. Newly appointed Prime Minister Chatchai also has spoken of the desirability of increased trade with Vietnam, and Foreign Minister Siddhi, the hardest of the hardliners in ASEAN, is uncharacteristically upbeat after two meetings with Co Thach, the first such encounter in two years. [redacted]

For the first time, China is pondering similar questions and showing signs that it may be ready for progress on Cambodia. The Chinese in July 1988

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broke with their tradition of speaking only through the resistance coalition by announcing their own peace proposal. [ ]

[ ] Beijing wanted to make clear China's sincerity about resolving the Cambodian problem. The proposal hints at an end to support for the Khmer Rouge—if conditions are right, such as an end to Hanoi's assistance to the PRK—according to US diplomats, and this suggests that Beijing is clearing the way for discussions on the tough issues. Chinese officials may be ready for such an exchange with the Soviets when they meet in Moscow in August 1988 to discuss the Cambodian problem (see inset). [ ]

China recognizes, in our view, that its control over developments in Cambodia is limited. Beijing's role is defined largely by its grip on the resistance factions' purse strings, especially those of the Khmer Rouge. [ ]

[ ] the Chinese provide between 250 and 350 tons of supplies a month to the Khmer Rouge along with cash for a total of roughly \$25 million a year in support. They also are the primary supplier of lethal aid to the non-Communist resistance. We believe there are other factors in China's calculations:

- It is sensitive to the depth of international abhorrence of the Khmer Rouge and does not want to appear as the only party trying to return that group to power. Steadfast flag-waving for the Khmer Rouge would impede efforts to improve relations with some ASEAN members, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, which are wary of the Chinese. It also would complicate relations with the United States.
- Beijing felt excluded from negotiations that produced the Afghanistan accords and does not want a repeat in Cambodia, where its interests are greater.
- China is carefully evaluating recent improvements in Soviet-US relations and may want to make similar headway with Moscow to restore some balance in the trilateral relationship. This would

require a lessening of the Cambodian obstacle, which China has set up as the primary hurdle to better Sino-Soviet ties. [ ]

Both Thailand and China consider the Khmer Rouge and their ability to impose limitations on the group as important bargaining chips, however, that they are not yet ready to play. While Beijing holds the purse strings, Bangkok provides sanctuary and controls the distribution of supplies. They believe continuing support for the Khmer Rouge is prudent because it still is the only source of military pressure on Vietnam.

#### **The Khmer Rouge: Backs to the Political Wall**

Intensifying public opposition to the Khmer Rouge probably has sounded alarms within that organization. With the last shreds of political legitimacy stripped away by Sihanouk's separation from the resistance coalition, the Khmer Rouge's past misdeeds and its odious reputation are coming home to roost. Furthermore, we believe the organization for the first time sees its limits now that Thailand and China openly discuss the possibility of ending support and obviously are maneuvering to avoid being tainted by association with the group. [ ]

At this juncture, the discredited Khmer Rouge is working hard to strengthen its hand politically and militarily. Khmer Rouge President Khieu Samphan in August 1988 announced a new peace initiative in an effort to allay fears about a Khmer Rouge return to power and to blunt recent public relations and diplomatic gains by Vietnam:

- The plan calls for a cease-fire and controls on the movement of all four Khmer factions. In exchange, the Khmer Rouge wants Vietnam to submit a

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**Cambodia Diplomatic Calendar, 1988****25 August**

*Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach met Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi in Bangkok.*

**27 August**

*China and the Soviet Union hold unprecedented meeting on Cambodia in Beijing.*

**October**

*Forty-third United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Prince Sihanouk is advocating that the Cambodia seat now occupied by the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea be kept vacant to further isolate the Khmer Rouge by denying it UN legitimacy. Sihanouk probably will not formally petition the United Nations to keep the seat open, however, [ ] and does not plan to attend the UNGA.*

*The annual resolution on Cambodia comes up for a vote at the UNGA. Vietnam and some ASEAN countries are urging changes in the resolution to reflect the changed diplomatic environment surrounding Cambodia since 1987. China and the Khmer Rouge oppose any wording change, hoping to keep the*

*focus on Vietnam's occupation. In any case, all parties will be looking for any significant change from last year's high of 117 votes in favor of the resolution that condemns Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.*

*Sihanouk to meet with senior US officials in Washington.*

**5 November**

*Third round of Sihanouk-Hun Sen talks in France.*

**By Yearend**

*First meeting of the working group of the four Cambodian factions established at the Jakarta talks. They will prepare for another round of informal talks, possibly by December 1988.*

*Vietnam has promised to withdraw 50,000 troops.*

*Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi visits Hanoi, which he agreed to in principle in June 1988, contingent on the further withdrawal of Vietnamese troops.*

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*detailed timetable for withdrawing from Cambodia. The Khmer factions and Vietnam would be subject to international supervision.*

- During the final phase of Vietnam's withdrawal, Prince Sihanouk would establish a new four-part government to organize elections. He also would form a coalition army under a four-part command with each faction represented equally. [ ]

*In the field, the guerrillas clearly are preparing for a political settlement or other developments inimical to their interests. Indeed, talk of a settlement highlights Khmer Rouge dependence on external support and*

*the vulnerability it represents. The guerrillas have virtually no sources of combat materiel inside Cambodia other than their supply dumps. [ ]*

*[ ] they are trying to expand these caches to improve sustainability in the event supplies are cut off. Khmer Rouge forces also are stepping up political action among the populace to generate popular appeal and undermine the PRK. In addition, the guerrillas are trying to carve a niche along the Thai-Cambodian border by recapturing their former headquarters complex at Phnom Melai and hilltop outposts occupied by*

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PRK troops. Several of these positions overlook infiltration routes used by non-Communist forces, giving the Khmer Rouge some ability to disrupt non-Communist operations. [ ]

### **The Soviet Perspective**

[ ] the Soviets are urging Vietnam to work toward an early resolution of the Cambodian problem, both to help Moscow improve relations with China and the ASEAN countries and to cut the cost of aid to Vietnam. The Soviets continue to support any format for talks on Cambodia that is acceptable to Hanoi, and, echoing Vietnam's, Soviet media have identified the need to prevent the Khmer Rouge from coming back to power as the key issue. Moscow praised the Jakarta talks, welcomed the scheduled renewal of the Hun Sen-Sihanouk talks, and has encouraged direct talks between Vietnam and China. Although, we believe, Vietnam has ample reasons of its own to want a settlement in Cambodia, changes in Moscow's view toward regional conflicts and the burden of foreign aid has sent a strong signal to Hanoi. Signs of flexibility by the Soviets and Vietnamese also have put pressure on China to avoid appearing obstructionist. Nevertheless, we have no evidence that Moscow is threatening drastic measures, such as reducing aid to Vietnam—about \$1.9 billion in economic and \$1.8 billion in military assistance in 1987—to force major changes in Vietnamese policy in Cambodia, such as a quicker withdrawal. Moscow apparently is unwilling to risk damage to bilateral relations or access to Cam Ranh Bay. [ ]

[ ] the Soviets are coming closer to their goal of convincing the Chinese that they are interested in a settlement in Cambodia. For example, in June 1988 a Chinese Foreign Ministry official talking with a US Embassy officer gave Moscow credit for influencing Hanoi's decision to withdraw 50,000 troops from Cambodia by the end of 1988. [ ]

### **Looking Ahead**

Although much hard bargaining and diplomatic maneuvering lie ahead, the two most likely scenarios for a settlement in Cambodia are beginning to come into

sharper focus: a multilateral agreement calling for a four-part coalition government or a bilateral accord between Sihanouk and Hun Sen:

- The four-part coalition is attractive because it probably would be subject to international guarantees and would take into account the interests of most of the key players. These factors would lend some durability to the agreement, particularly since this formula would also presumably address the Khmer Rouge problem.
- On the other hand, a bilateral agreement between Sihanouk and Hun Sen is far less complicated and would be easier to achieve. Instead of seeking some compromise between several interested parties, Sihanouk and Hun Sen could present them with a fait accompli. Moreover, the sticky problem of meeting Vietnam's demands for removing the Pol Pot clique from the Khmer Rouge and disarming the group would be sidestepped. With Sihanouk trying to establish a new regime and the international community looking on, Thailand and China also would face pressure to cut support for the Khmer Rouge. In discussions in August 1988 with Japanese Prime Minister Takeshita and ASEAN chiefs of mission in Tokyo, Sihanouk said this alternative is the "only possible solution," according to US diplomats.
- Either way, we believe instability will be chronic. The four-part coalition probably would face internal power struggles, for example, as the various parties vie for control. If Sihanouk joins Hun Sen, the Khmer Rouge probably will continue the armed struggle against fragile government forces. [ ]

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